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Export intention in developing countries: A configuration approach to managerial success factors

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ABSTRACT

What drives small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to enter export markets? This study introduces a configuration approach using a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to show that, contrary to previous findings, export intention does not depend on any one managerial characteristic, but rather on the interplay of these attributes. Using a sample of 180 Algerian non-exporters, findings suggest that firms' export intention is determined by two distinct combinations of managerial attributes, namely: (export perception*entrepreneurial orientation) and (export perception*international orientation*foreign knowledge*Age). In line with the emerging resource orchestration view, such findings hold significant implications for both theory and practice.

Introduction

For small businesses, exporting can constitute a reliable source of growth, competitiveness, and survival (Pattnayak & Thangavelu, 2014). Thus, stimulating firms to enter export markets through public assistance has become a priority in many countries (Kanda, Mejiá-Dugand, & Hjelm, 2013). However, promoting new exporters remains a challenging task for governments and export promotion organizations (EPOs), especially in developing countries. Here, firms are often reluctant to enter what they perceive as demanding and uncertain markets (Al-Hyari, Al-Weshah, & Alnsour, 2012). Consequently, studies identifying the relevant internal resources in enhancing export initiation have emerged. Drawing on the resource-based view (RBV), evidence suggest that firms' international market entry is conditioned by the possession of certain resources and capabilities (Serra, Pointon, & Abdou, 2012; Van Beveren & Vandebussche, 2010; Yang, Chen, & Chuang, 2004). Among these resources, managerial attributes have been cited as central to the international development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Nemkova, Souchon, & Hughes, 2012).

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However, notwithstanding the usefulness of the RBV in identifying the key assets for internationalization, the majority of previous works have been unable to identify specific resource deployment strategies (Gruber, Heinemann, Brettel, & Hungeling, 2010; Hitt, Xu, & Carnes, 2016). Attempts to explain the mechanism whereby resources and capabilities lead to performance enhancement have been scarce as most extant works narrowly focused on the individual influence of such assets in isolation (Raddats et al., 2017; Sjödin, Parida, & Kohtamäki, 2016). In this regard, Hughes, Hodgkinson, Elliott, and Hughes (2018) emphasize the necessity of going beyond the current approach by uncovering the relevant configurations likely to increase performance. Known as resource orchestration, the combined influence of resources and capabilities is more likely to drive performance (Chadwick, Super, & Kwon, 2015) and enhance competitiveness, as opposed to single effects (Hughes et al., 2018). With limited resources, SMEs need to create effective asset synergies to offset their constraints, address market ambiguity (Gelhard & Delft, 2016a), and sustain a unique competitive advantage (Ho, Plewa, & Lu, 2016). In fact, though firms are likely to possess similar resources within a given industry, it is the uniqueness of their synergies that protect them from imitation by competitors (Kozlenkova, Samaha, & Palmatier, 2014). Nordqvist, Sharma, and Chirico (2014) assert that superior performance is the result of a gestalt of multiple, interrelated, and mutually reinforcing organizational and structural characteristics. This supports Barney's (2014: p. 25) argument stating that "Resource based theory suggests that the optimal strategy for a particular firm depends on its constellation of resources and capabilities." Despite this, the relevant combinations of resources driving performance are yet to be determined, leaving the RBV approach not fully explored (Gruber et al., 2010; Ho et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2018).

The reason behind the lack of evidence on resource orchestration appears to be of a methodological nature. Ho et al. (2016) argue that the frequent use of multiple regression studies to explore the strategic role of firms' resources is the key reason for this gap. The latter relies on the net effect which could potentially lead to misleading results (Ho et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2018; Woodside & Zhang, 2012). For instance, while a given resource could emerge as trivial when accounting for its direct influence on performance, it can become otherwise when combined with additional assets (Ordanini & Rubera, 2008). Thus, Woodside (2013) explains that a researcher may still uncover a substantial share of variance in the outcome even when none of the predictors is significant (in terms of net effect). Moreover, Barney (2014) questions the relevance of frequentists approach when testing the RBV, and argues for case-based, non-frequentist and Bayesian techniques as more appropriate. Barney suggests the former approach is ill suited as it is based on the "average" effect, which could misrepresent the influence of the resources under study.

Practically, these limitations have affected the relevance of the RBV as a practical tool to maximize performance (Hughes et al., 2018).

The current use of this approach lacks guidance on how firms' resources and capabilities can increase performance (Sheehan & Foss, 2007; Sirmon, Hitt, & Ireland, 2007), providing limited practical insights to policymakers and SMEs seeking to develop international competitive advantages (Kunc & Morecroft, 2010; Merino, Monreal-Pérez, & Sánchez-Marín, 2015). Since the latter is likely to arise from an effective combination of resources, understanding these configurations become crucial for achieving a durable positive outcome (Hughes et al., 2018).

Against these backdrops, the present study contributes to the extant literature by uncovering the managerial resource configurations likely to result in a successful international market entry. Going beyond the individual effect of managerial attributes, the study posits that SMEs' international market entry is achieved through the deployment of specific resource bundles. Thus, the study seeks to answer an important research question, which remains unanswered, namely: *which combinations of managerial attributes lead to SMEs' international market entry?* Providing novel insights on the potential managerial resource configurations that are likely to result in superior export performance offers increased understanding of optimum resource deployment strategies (Gruber et al., 2010; Ho et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2018) and in the same way increase the usefulness of the RBV in explaining SMEs' export initiation. The use of a configurational approach offers great potential to advance SME literature (Nordqvist et al., 2014), and offers an insight on resource configurations that SMEs and export promotion organizations in developing countries should target to enhance their effectiveness.

To achieve its aim, the study is based on a case-based analysis using fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (hereafter fsQCA), which is a set-membership analytical technique used for complex configuration analyses (Ordanini, Parasuraman, & Rubera, 2014; Ragin, 2000). The fsQCA technique posits that the influence of attributes (management characteristics) on a specific outcome (export intention) is associated with how the conditions are combined (forming recipes), rather than on the levels of the individual attributes per se. The study takes place in the context of Algerian manufacturing SMEs, which is neglected in the internationalization literature. Existing studies typically focus on developed countries, and their findings are often generalized across different contexts. However, their relevance for firms operating in developing nations is questionable (Boso, Cadogan, & Story, 2012). Although several studies have begun to explore this issue in the sub-Saharan African context (Boso et al., 2012; Matanda, Ndubisi, & Jie, 2016; Robson & Freel, 2008), evidence from North Africa remains nascent.

Hence, this study adds a contextual contribution by providing evidence from a neglected region.

The context of study: Algeria

Algeria is the largest African country in terms of landmass and the third most important economy within the MENA region (World Bank, 2017). However, being an oil-rich country, its economy remains dependent on oil and gas revenues (Global Insight, 2014). In particular, the country's exports performance are amid the least diversified globally, even when compared to similar oil-rich countries. Algerian non-oil exports are marginal and account for eight percent of the country's total exports (International Monetary Fund, 2016). Consequently, the country has been urged to shift toward a more diversified economy in order to achieve sustainable growth and further employment (World Bank, 2017). Despite the Algerian government's efforts in promoting exports, the number of exporting SMEs remains marginal. The Algerian Chamber of Commerce (2016) identified only 520 exporters that could be attributed to lack of relevance and inefficient targeting of assistance. Hence, empirical studies identifying the relevant resources and attributes motivating SMEs' to enter export markets are likely to increase the effectiveness of the government export assistance through a more efficient targeting (Haddoud, Jones, & Newbery, 2017). Given the importance of the decision maker in the SME context, identifying key managerial resources in the internalization process would assist Algerian public organizations with effective and efficient targeting of their programs.

Conceptualizing export intention

The determinants of firms' export activity have been extensively studied in the empirical literature (Acedo & Galan, 2011; Love, Roper, & Zhou, 2016; Nemkova et al., 2012; Pinho & Martins, 2010; Serra et al., 2012). However, though these studies typically focused on existing exporters and elements affecting their success in foreign markets, limited research has been conducted to identify factors influencing non-exporters to enter foreign markets (Cruz, 2014; Suárez-Ortega & Álamo-Vera, 2005). Leonidou and Katsikeas (2010) highlight in their literature review that only 14% of studies focused on non-exporters. Though Yang, Leone, and Alden (1992) and Jaffe and Pasternak (1994) argue the extant literature was largely limited to exporters reflecting on prior behavior, which is likely to affect information accuracy. Dosoglu-Guner (2001) reiterates that the question as to what influence non-exporters to initiate their export activities remains unanswered. Addressing this question would assist export promotion organizations in allocating their funding more effectively by identifying the specific needs of non-exporters

and support the most appropriate export promotion programs. In this regard, Yang et al. (1992) stress that the use of profiles of current exporters to identify potential exporters have yielded mixed results. Therefore, the focus of the present study is on non-exporters' intention to export. This intention captures efforts and plans SMEs are ready to implement in order to start exporting. It is well established that pre-export activities, which often lead to actual export behavior, are strongly linked to export intentions (Wiedersheim-Paul, Olson, & Welch, 1978). Firms exhibiting a strong export intention are most likely to develop a successful export initiation and development strategies (Morgan & Katsikeas, 1997; Yang et al., 1992).

Managerial determinants of export intention

A theoretical approach

Despite its limitations, the current use of the RBV approach has been crucial in identifying the different triggers behind firms' international market entry (Beleska-Spasova, Glaister, & Stride, 2012; Sousa, Martínez-López, & Coelho, 2008). Indeed several theories to explain market entry have been mooted (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Da Rocha, Kury, & Monteiro, 2009). This being said, a contrast is noted here where two distinct but influential approaches of internationalization are often debated (Love et al., 2016), namely the stages approach (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977) emphasizing knowledge and experience factors, and the "born global" approach advocating opportunistic attributes (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994).

According to the stages theory (also known as the Uppsala Model) (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), firms' internationalization is an incremental and sequential process that proceeds through different stages. Here, managers increase their commitment to international markets based on their gradual acquisition and use of foreign market knowledge and experience, helping them to reduce uncertainty (Frynas & Mellahi, 2015). Hence, SMEs' internationalization would be triggered when their managers' acquire the relevant foreign knowledge and experience among other factors. Contrastingly, many SMEs were found to adopt a more opportunistic behavior to international market entry (Lloyd-Reason & Mughan, 2002). Not all firms adopt a gradual approach, and many "leapfrog" into internationalization following a more strategic approach (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003). Arguing a "born global" view, scholars explained that these firms start their internationalization process from their inception, and do not necessarily wait until they acquire the relevant knowledge and experience (Hashai, 2011). Instead, the internationalization of such firms is triggered by managerial entrepreneurial attitudes in terms of risk tolerance and proactiveness (Frynas & Mellahi, 2015; Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

In summary, although highlighting different triggers, the two approaches seem to agree upon the importance of the decision maker's characteristics in shaping SMEs' internationalization. However, the debate on SMEs' internationalization should evolve from a basic argumentation against or for the incremental internationalization to a more complex approach recognizing that such a process is influenced by multiple factors (Lloyd-Reason & Mughan, 2002). Supporting the resource orchestration view (Hughes et al., 2018), this study tackles this complex phenomenon by uncovering configurations of managerial traits intervening in the internationalization process, which are next considered.

Managerial characteristics

SMEs "are not smaller versions of big business" (Shuman & Seeger, 1986: p. 8). These differ considerably in terms of organizational resources and management systems, which would in turn affect their internationalization process (Lu & Beamish, 2001). For SMEs, strategic decisions related to foreign market entry are typically the direct responsibility of the owner/manager (Omri & Becuwe, 2014). Such strategic decisions are reflected in the characteristics of these owners/managers. SMEs tend to put managerial characteristics in the center of the international decision-making process (Laufs, Bembom, & Schwens, 2016).

On the determinants of export intention, Reid (1981) posits that the recognition and the influence of an export stimulus are related to the management's knowledge, attitudes, and motivation toward internationalization. The manager's traits are likely to affect the firms' participation in export activities (Katsikeas & Piercy, 1993). Miesenbock (1988: p. 42) argues that the decision maker is "the one to decide starting, ending and increasing international activities." Several prior studies have tested the role of the decision-maker's attributes in enhancing SMEs export behavior (Sousa et al., 2008; Zou & Stan, 1998). In general, the export literature considers the entrepreneur's capital as a valuable resource that enhances SMEs' internationalization (Lafuente, Stoian, & Rialp, 2015).

Decision makers' characteristics influencing firms' internationalization have been classified into objective and subjective traits. Though the former includes factors such as age, educational level, language proficiency, and experience abroad, the latter covers characteristics related to perceptions, attitudes, and behavior (Suárez-Ortega & Álamo-Vera, 2005). The most studied characteristics were age, educational background, professional experience, foreign travels, language proficiency, innovativeness, risk tolerance, and managerial perceptions (Stoian & Rialp-Criado, 2010). Therefore, this study includes the owner/manager's age, foreign knowledge, international orientation (foreign experience, language proficiency), entrepreneurial orientation (innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness), and export perception as managerial attributes affecting firms'

export intention. These are examined in greater detail, prior to exploring our configurational framing.

Manager's age. Age could be regarded as a precursor for low export propensity yet previous findings have been mixed and inconsistent (Ibeh, 2004). Though Lautanen (2000), Ibeh (2004), Suárez-Ortega and Álamo-Vera (2005), Robson and Freel (2008) and Serra et al. (2012) established no relationship between managers' age and firms' likelihood to start exporting, other studies argued that firms with younger managers tend to be more internationally oriented (Caughey & Chetty, 1994; Moon & Lee, 1990). It was claimed that younger managers are more energetic, have greater interest in higher earnings, are risk takers and actively seek export opportunities (Caughey & Chetty, 1994; Serra et al., 2012). Hence, younger managers, who enjoy traits such as greater energy and enhanced risk taking attitudes, are more likely to venture into export markets. That is, the combination of youth and proactive risk taking attitude is the one likely to enhance SMEs' export initiation.

Manager's foreign knowledge. Lack of knowledge is recognized as a barrier preventing SMEs from entering international markets, especially in developing countries (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Shih & Wickramasekera, 2011). In accordance with the stages theory (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), knowledge acquisition would reduce uncertainty and enhance firms' commitment to international markets (Casillas, Barbero, & Sapienza, 2015). However, findings are inconsistent. Evidence from Portugal (Pinho & Martins, 2010), the UK (Nemkova et al., 2012), Jordan (Al-Hyari et al., 2012), and Turkey (Uner, Kocak, Cavusgil, & Cavusgil, 2013) confirms that foreign knowledge reduces international market uncertainties and enhances internationalization (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Pinho & Martins, 2010; Uner et al., 2013). Accurate and reliable export knowledge and skills assists the decision-making process and increase managers' flexibility to deal with export problems (Morgan & Katsikeas, 1997; Nemkova et al., 2012). By contrast, evidence from China reveal that when managers have high knowledge of export activities, they tend to be more aware of risks and costs associated with exporting and hence reduce their export exposure (Ling-Yee, 2004). However, Morgan and Katsikeas (1997) explain that foreign knowledge is correlated with positive perceptions toward export markets. Wang and Olsen (2002) posit that foreign market knowledge may only enhance export behavior when the latter is associated with a positive profitability perception of exporting. Similarly, Denicolai, Zucchella, and Strange (2014) suggest that knowledge intensity increases firms' international performance only when complemented with additional assets. Hence, it is argued that managers' foreign knowledge is likely to increase SMEs' intention to export, mainly when the latter is associated with a positive perception.

Manager's International Orientation. International orientation typically refers to the manager's foreign travel experience, language expertise and international experience (Gençtürk & Kotabe, 2001). In theory, managers with previous international experience are more likely to develop strategic international partners and generate sales (Reuber & Fischer, 1997). They often have high awareness and willingness to seek export opportunities (Casillas et al., 2015). In addition, language proficiency reduces psychic distance to foreign markets, avoid miscommunication, and positively influence international market entry (Densil, 2011; Nemkova et al., 2012). Empirically, although Cavusgil and Naor (1987) found that the ability to speak foreign languages was among the weakest determinants of the export decision, several studies demonstrated that managers' international orientation or at least one of its dimensions, positively influence firms' decision to enter export markets (Paliwoda, 2013). Managers' foreign travels (Miesenbock, 1988; Ruzzier, Antoncic, Hisrich, & Konecnik, 2007), successful prior international experience (Dichtl, Koeglmayr, & Mueller, 1990; Nemkova et al., 2012; Wiedersheim-Paul et al., 1978), and foreign languages abilities (Densil, 2011; Nemkova et al., 2012; Obben & Magagula, 2003; Serra et al., 2012; Shih & Wickramasekera, 2011) were confirmed as key precursors of firms' decision to enter foreign markets. Therefore, it could be concluded that when combined, managers in terms of foreign travels, language abilities, and international experience are likely to have a positive influence on SMEs' export intention.

Manager's entrepreneurial orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation includes three dimensions, namely, innovativeness, risk taking, and proactiveness (Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2015). Though innovativeness refers to the propensity to be creative and experimental, risk taking speaks of taking audacious actions and proactiveness is associated with opportunity-seeking behaviors (Martin & Javalgi, 2016). In keeping with the born global view, entrepreneurial orientation and opportunity seeking behavior are emphasized as crucial for international market entry (Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2015; Zahra & George, 2002). SMEs enjoying high levels of entrepreneurial orientation capabilities are more effectively equipped to overcome the liabilities of foreignness (Brouthers, Nakos, & Dimitratos, 2015). Firms with high entrepreneurial orientation are particularly efficient in exploiting international opportunities (Martin & Javalgi, 2016). Entrepreneurially oriented managers are more proactive and innovative in developing effective export strategies to overcome barriers to entry (Brouthers et al., 2015). Empirically, several studies have confirmed the relationship between firms' with entrepreneurial orientation capabilities and export decision. Evidence from the UK (Ruzzier et al., 2007), Spain (Acedo & Galan, 2011) and Taiwan (Shih & Wickramasekera, 2011) highlighted a link between at least one dimension of entrepreneurial orientation and firms' probability of being exporters. However, additional evidence failed to confirm such a positive

role and even reported a negative influence (Frank, Kessler, & Fink, 2010). Deligianni, Dimitratos, Petrou, and Aharoni (2015) found that firms' international performance could be enhanced by entrepreneurial orientation only when the latter is coupled with decision rationality. Zahra and Garvis (2000) revealed that entrepreneurial orientation contribution to firms' success depends on the managers' perceptions of the international business environment. Therefore, it could be concluded that managers' entrepreneurial orientation may only have a positive influence on SMEs' export intention, when the latter is coupled with a positive perception.

Manager's export perceptions. Export perception here refers to export profit and growth opportunities perception. In general, favorable perceptions constitute important determinants of firms' decision to export (Naidu & Prasad, 1994; Ruzzier et al., 2007; Shih & Wickramasekera, 2011; Zou & Stan, 1998). In contrast, negative perceptions lead to low export sales (Zou & Stan, 1998). Employing Weick's (1969) seminal work on managerial perceptions, it could be argued that perceptions of a given activity, instead of the actual objective situation, are seen as influencing attributes in the decision-making process. Therefore, managers with positive perception toward profitability of export markets exhibit high commitment, allocate sufficient resources to export activities, seek new opportunities, plan market entry, and develop effective export marketing strategies (Johnston & Czinkota, 1982; Sousa et al., 2008). However, some evidence did not confirm such a link. Serra et al. (2012) found the perception benefits related to exporting did not significantly influence the decision to start exporting. Thus, scholars posit that only when a favorable perception is accompanied with provocativeness (Katsikeas, Deng, & Wortzel, 1997; Solberg & Durrieu, 2006; Zou & Stan, 1998), entrepreneurial orientation (Zahra & Garvis, 2000), or foreign knowledge (Wang & Olsen, 2002), that this would enhance international market entry.

A configuration view

Overall, though the empirical export literature appears to have been producing inconsistent and sometimes contradictory findings regarding the role of individual managerial attributes in the internalization process, some evidence suggests that such characteristics may only have an influence when combined with at least an additional factor. For instance, explanations from Caughey and Chetty (1994) and Serra et al. (2012) suggest that a younger age would only enhance internationalization when associated with proactiveness. Similarly, Zahra and Garvis (2000) and Deligianni et al. (2015) argue the relevance of entrepreneurial orientation only when combined with a positive perception, whereas Wang and Olsen (2002) support a similar approach in

relation to foreign market knowledge. Therefore, this could constitute the key reason behind the inconsistent findings obtained thus far, and would further support the resource orchestration view put forward by Gruber et al. (2010) and Hughes et al. (2018). Thus, this study investigates combinations of management attributes leading to export market entry. That is, the study attempts to test the proposition that “the joint presence of at least two managerial export-related attributes (namely; age, foreign knowledge, international orientation, entrepreneurial orientation and positive perceptions) will lead to high export intention.” However, since limited existing empirical evidence has pointed toward such combinations, no hypotheses are developed in this study. In fact, hypotheses are atypical to the configuration approach (Kent, 2015). Instead, identifying such combinations will be data-driven and is conducted through the fsQCA analysis.

Sample and data collection

In Algeria, the total number of SMEs accounts for 169,238 firms nationally, from which 81,348 were in the manufacturing sector (MDIPI, 2015). The data were collected through a two-wave mix of online and offline surveys. Online questionnaires were administered first, followed by hard copies distributed during trade fairs. To avoid duplicates, questionnaires were identified by the name of the company these originated from. The initial sampling frame was gathered from the Algerian Chamber of Commerce database. The study targeted non-exporting SMEs with export potential.¹ According to Algeria Press Service (2015), these would only account for 1,200 firms nationally. Given such a limited number, the study included all existing manufacturing segments, including food and beverage, metal products, textile and clothing, tobacco, wood and paper products, furniture and “other” manufacturing. In total, 180 valid responses were received.

The key informants were owner/managers or the export manager (if applicable) as they constitute the most relevant source of information (Sousa et al., 2008). The survey collected information from a single respondent per firm, as Sousa et al. (2008) revealed regarding SMEs, there is generally only one person dealing with export activities. The final sample size is considered as highly representative given the limited number of SMEs with export interest across the country. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the surveyed firms. The majority of SMEs employed less than 250 employees, has been operating for less than 25 years, were either owned by a sole proprietor or family owned, were managed by their owner(s), and operated in various manufacturing sectors with a slight prevalence of “Petroleum,

¹The potential for export in Algeria is captured through the firms’ interest and participation to trade events organized by Algerian export promotion organizations.

Table 1. Firms' characteristics.

Number of employees (size)	Percent (valid percentages)
Less than 10	20.7
10–50	32.9
51–250	25.6
251–500	20.7
<i>Firms' Age</i>	<i>Years</i>
Less than 2	10.2
2–10	26.9
11–25	34.7
26–50	24.0
Over 50	4.2
<i>Firms' ownership</i>	
Sole proprietorship	35.2
Family ownership	40.6
Partnership	10.3
Other	13.9
<i>Management type</i>	
An appointed manager	28.2
The owner	71.8
<i>Sector</i>	
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	3.6
Mining	1.8
Food, beverage, and tobacco	6.1
Wood and paper product	2.4
Printing, publishing, and recorded media	4.2
Petroleum, chemical, plastic, and rubber product	17.0
Metal product	8.5
Construction	7.3
Furniture and other manufacturing	3.0
Other	32.1

chemical, plastic and rubber product” and “Food, beverage and tobacco” SMEs. It should be noted, however, that these characteristics reflect some disparities when compared against the characteristics of the overall sample. Here, the sample understudy includes a greater number of larger SMEs (250–500 employees) and a lower number of firms operating in the Metal sector.

Non-response was tested using Armstrong and Overton's extrapolation method (1977). This was conducted by comparing early and late responses. The t-test has revealed no significant differences in most of the selected items. This not only rules out potential major non-response bias and reveals no major differences between the online and offline collections methods (since early respondents are mostly online and late ones offline). To assess for common method bias, the study conducted post hoc tests, namely Harman's one-factor and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) tests. With the former, the first factor accounted for less than 50 percent of the total variances, hence showing no major sign of common method bias. As for Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) method, following Liang, Saraf, Hu, and Xue (2007) instructions, a PLS model with a common method factor, including all items of the study and estimated each item's variances that explained its

principle construct and common method factor was run. The results showed that most method-based factor loadings were statistically non-significant, whereas the average variance of the items was 0.63 compared to the average method-based variances of 0.011. This confirms that common method bias is unlikely to be a significant issue in this study (Liang et al., 2007; Lings, Durden, Lee, & Cadogan, 2014; Obadia, 2013).

Measures

Export intention was measured using a three-item construct developed by Yang et al. (1992), capturing (1) the firms' interest in exporting, (2) the firms' plans to initiate export sales, and (3) the firms' plans to allocate additional resources to exporting. This construct was used as it measures the pre-export activities potential exporters would undertake. According to Yang et al. (1992), firms with a high export intention would make plans to start selling abroad and allocate necessary resources. As for managerial characteristics, "Foreign Knowledge" was adapted from Leonidou, Palihawadana, and Theodosiou (2011), capturing knowledge about foreign demand, export regulations and administration, foreign business practices, and transportation and shipping practices. International orientation measured a set of items previously used in Joynt's (1982), Genctürk and Kotabe (2001), and Obben and Magagula (2003) studies. These captured managers' ability to speak foreign languages, previous international experience, and foreign travels. For export perception, respondents were asked about their level of perceptions regarding export sales compared with the domestic ones (Calof, 1994; Axinn et al. 1995). Finally, for entrepreneurial orientation, the study used an instrument developed by Ibeh and Young (2001). All these constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale. Full definitions of these variables are presented in Table 2.

Analysis

This study employs a configurational analysis using fsQCA. Following Cheng, Chang, and Li (2013), the study needs to assess the scales reliability and validity as well as endogeneity issues, prior to conducting the fsQCA analysis. This is mainly done through a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling approach using SmartPLS 3.27 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015a, 2015b).

Scales reliability and validity

The study examines (1) the individual reliability of all the indicators through their loadings,² (2) both composite and Cronbach's Alpha coefficients to check the constructs' reliability, and (3) the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (see Table 2),

²Confirmatory Factor Analysis PLS is available upon request.

Table 2. Managerial characteristics.

Managerial characteristics	Definitions
Export knowledge	Export knowledge refers to knowledge and skills related to export activities. These skills are generally related to foreign markets characteristics and practices, export procedures, and transportation practices (Leonidou & Katsikeas, 2010).
International orientation	International orientation concerns the decision maker's foreign travels, ability to speak foreign languages, and international experience (Gençtürk & Kotabe, 2001).
Entrepreneurial orientations	Entrepreneurial orientation refers to the extent to which the decision makers pursue new ideas and markets for exporting (innovativeness), seize international opportunities, seek information (proactiveness), and perceive export-related risks versus opportunities (risk-taking) (Ibeh, 2004).
Export perception	Export perception refers to the extent to which the decision maker's favorable perception toward export profits (Louter, Ouwerkerk, & Bakker, 1991).

Table 3. Composite reliability, Cronbach's Alpha, AVE, and VIFs coefficients.

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	VIF
Entrepreneurial orientation	0.79	0.86	0.55	1.60
Export knowledge	0.87	0.91	0.72	1.80
Export perception	0.79	0.87	0.63	1.18
International orientation	0.73	0.83	0.56	2.01
Age	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.07
Export intention	0.90	0.94	0.84	/

and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations criterion (HTMT) to examine the constructs' convergent and discriminant validities, respectively (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016).

Table 3 shows that all the values of the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were higher than the 0.7 thresholds implying that the measurement model has a good reliability. Similarly, the table illustrates that all AVEs exceeded the threshold of 0.5 meaning that all constructs have a good convergent validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). The table demonstrates the values of the VIFs are all below the threshold of five meaning the absence of both multicollinearity. For discriminant validity, the HTMT's threshold should be 0.90 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). Here, discriminant validity has been established since all results of the HTMT.90 criterion are below the critical value of 0.90. Based on the reliability, validity and collinearity tests conducted for both the first and second order variables, the measurement model presents satisfactory values.

Endogeneity issues

When causal effects are examined, endogeneity issues and unobserved heterogeneity may arise (Papies, Ebbes, & van Heerde, 2017). For unobserved heterogeneity, Gelhard, Von Delft, and Gudergan (2016b) suggest the use of a combination of FIMIX-PLS and fsQCA to fully capture unobserved heterogeneity problems. Though the former would detect the presence of segments

within the sample, the latter would identify the configurations reflecting heterogeneity (equifinality). As such, fsQCA assumes that variables may hold different effects in different combinations and thus can address effects caused by unobserved heterogeneity (Gelhard et al., 2016b; Park, El Sawy, & Fiss, 2017). In this study, FIMIX-PLS suggests the presence of two heterogeneous segments (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Gudergan, 2018) and these were captured by the subsequent use of fsQCA (as shown in the next section). Hence, unobserved heterogeneity is accounted for in this study.

For endogeneity, a structural model was run to capture the influence this issue on the relationships under study. To check this, WarpPLS Kock (2017) has been used. Kock (2017) introduced a test in its latest version (version 6) that employs the instrument variable approach in order to see whether endogeneity problems are having major impact on the studied relationships. In this study, the instrument variable approach is used to assess the impact of endogeneity issues. Here, export assistance is considered as a valid instrument, since it correlates theoretically with the regressor variables but not with the dependent variable (Papies et al., 2017). Previous works showed that export assistance is directly correlated with managers' attributes (Leonidou et al., 2011; Shamsuddoha, Ali, & Ndubisi, 2009). The results yielded no sign of major endogeneity issues.

Reversed causality issues may also arise when causality is studied. According to Kock (2017), reversed causality may be present when Simpson's paradox instances are detected. To assess this, WarpPLS 6.0 provides several indicators, namely: the Simpson Paradox Ratio (SPR) (Kock & Gaskins, 2016; Pearl, 2009), the Statistical Suppression Ratio (SSR) (Kock & Gaskins, 2016; MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000), and the path-correlation ratio. In this study, all these indicators met the proposed criteria. Finally, to reduce risks of omitted variables, the study tested the influence of several control variables. Papies et al. (2017) argue that a large part of omitted variables problems can be solved by the inclusion of relevant control variables. Accordingly, the study controlled for (1) firm Size (Filatotchev, Liu, Buck, & Wright, 2009; Serra et al., 2012), (2) firms' Age (Srinivasan & Archana, 2011), (3) firms' Ownership (Fernández & Nieto, 2006), and (4) Management Type (Dosoglu-Guner, 2001). Sector was also controlled for to capture the influence of sector differences (Gashi, Hashi, & Pugh, 2014; Stoian, Rialp, & Rialp, 2011). These had no significant influence on the proposed relationships.

A configurational approach using fsQCA

Introduced by Ragin (2000), fsQCA is based on a Boolean algebra system identifying a sufficient set of conditions for a given outcome (Ordanini et al., 2014). fsQCA is a set-theoretic approach to causality analysis, including a set of conditions leading to a given outcome. Unlike the classical regression analysis, fsQCA does not identify the effect of a given independent variable

on a dependent variable; instead, it identifies causal configurations leading to an outcome (Fiss, Sharapov, & Cronqvist, 2013). The technique accounts for contrarian cases that do not necessarily fall within the general trend of the data (Woodside, 2014). The application of a configurational analysis reveals patterns in the data that otherwise would have been difficult to identify in a regression analysis (Kent, 2015; Vis, 2012).

Calibration. Using the fsQCA technique, both the causal conditions (manager's characteristics) and the outcomes (export intention) are represented using fuzzy set scores (Ragin, 2009). Compared to other techniques, the "fuzziness" associated with fsQCA allows for more fine-grained assessments of the different levels of managerial traits, since the calibration involves assigning cases based on their degree of membership in sets of causal conditions and outcomes (Ragin, 2008a). This is done by transforming the conventional variables scores into fuzzy membership scores with values ranging from 0.00 to 1.00 (Ragin, 2008a, 2008b). In the calibration process, the researcher needs to set three values corresponding to three qualitative anchors that constitute a fuzzy set and that would delineate three thresholds, namely: fuzzy scores of 0.95 for full membership, 0.05 for non-membership, and 0.5 for cross-over (Ragin, 2009). To match fuzzy set calibration with the Likert-type five-point scales, scores of 1 (strongly disagree), 3 (neutral), and 5 (strongly agree) as representing non-membership (0), cross over point (0.5), and full membership (1) were assigned (Gast et al., 2018).

Sufficiency analysis. The antecedents of two sets of outcomes are next presented, namely high export intention (EX_INT) and low export intention (~EX_INT). Truth tables containing the logically possible combinations of conditions are generated (Ragin, 2008a). To identify the relevant configurations, the study identifies the combinations with a minimum number of cases (frequency threshold) and the appropriate consistency score (consistency cut-off) (Woodside & Zhang, 2012). Following Cheng et al. (2013), a frequency threshold of at least one case was chosen, capturing 100 percent of the cases in the study, which is higher than Ragin's (2008a, 2008b) criterion (Ren, Tsai, & Eisingerich, 2016). Consistency is similar to significance metrics in statistical hypothesis testing (Woodside & Zhang, 2012), it assesses the proportion of the cases under a given configuration displaying the outcome (Ragin, 2008a, 2008b; Woodside & Zhang, 2012). Ragin (2008a, 2008b) suggests that gaps in the upper range of consistency are useful for establishing a consistency threshold and that the threshold below 0.75 indicates substantial inconsistency. In this study, the consistency threshold is set at 0.80 for high export intention (Kent, 2015). Table 4 shows the intermediate solution for high export intention. To enhance the readability and clarity of this table, a simple representation in which black circles indicate the presence of

Table 4. Solutions for high export intention.

Export knowledge	International orientation	Export perception	Entrepreneurial orientation	Age	Consistency	Raw coverage	Unique coverage
○	○	●	●	○	0.86	0.64	0.35
●	●	●	○	●	0.87	0.32	0.03

○ – Absence of condition

● – Presence of condition

Solution coverage = 0.68; Solution consistency = 0.85

a causal condition and white circles indicate the absence or negation of a condition.

From [Table 4](#), two consistent combinations of managerial characteristics predicting export intention emerged. These are regarded as sufficient conditions leading to firms' export intention. The configurations suggest that SMEs run by owner/managers over 40 years old yet with high export knowledge, international orientation, and positive export perception are most likely to have high export intention (consistency score of 0.87). Alternatively, firms with young owner/managers characterized by high entrepreneurial orientation and positive export perception are also likely to have high export intention (consistency score of 0.86). Alongside the consistency measure, coverage should also be examined. Coverage assesses the proportion of cases explained by a condition (unique coverage) or a combination (raw coverage) with an acceptable level of consistency (above 0.80 in this case) (Kent, 2015; Ragin, 2008a, 2008b). Coverage is similar to the effect size in the regression analysis (Woodside & Zhang, 2012). Here, raw coverage for both combinations was 64 percent and 32 percent, indicating an important proportion of firms' export intention captured by each combination. Similarly, the overall solution coverage indicates the extent to which high export intentions can be determined by the set of configurations. This is akin to the R-square value reported in variable-based techniques (Woodside, 2013). The results show an overall solution coverage of 68 percent, which suggests that a significant proportion of the export intention is explained by the two combinations. Turning to the conditions leading to low export intention, the truth table has provided the following results (see [Table 5](#)).³ It could be argued that two combinations could lead to low export intention. When only the age condition is present, SMEs are more likely to be non-exporters, whereas when none of the conditions is present, SMEs are

Table 5. Solutions for low export intention.

Export knowledge	International orientation	Export perception	Entrepreneurial orientation	Age	Raw Consistency
○	○	○	○	●	0.82
○	○	○	○	○	0.80

○ – Absence of condition

● – Presence of condition

³Since the initial truth table provided only two relevant combinations, no intermediate analysis was run in this.

also likely to not export. This highlights that the age factor can only enhance firms' export intention when associated with additional attributes such as export knowledge and experience.

Logical necessity analysis

Following the sufficiency analysis presented already, a logical necessity analysis highlights the necessary individual conditions for a given outcome. These individual conditions would be necessary but not sufficient to produce the outcome (Kent, 2015). The analysis of logical necessity for a high export intention shows that export perception has the highest consistency (0.88), so is probably a necessary (yet not sufficient) condition to high export intention. These results are next discussed.

Discussion

The findings identified two combinations of managerial attributes explaining 68 percent of high export intention likelihood. In line with the proposition developed in this study, these configurations do not only verify the application of the resource orchestration view in the context of Algerian SMEs' international market entry (Hughes et al., 2018), but also reveal *multiple* configurations likely to enhance SMEs' export initiation (equifinality). The configuration approach revealed that for Algerian SMEs to be exporters, positive export perception (by the decision maker) is a necessity. However, this condition is not sufficient, those managers have to either have a high entrepreneurial orientation (be a risk taker, innovative and proactive) *or* possess sufficient export knowledge and international orientation (foreign languages competencies, previous foreign experience, foreign travels). Lastly, the age factor seems to decrease firms' chances to go abroad unless coupled with additional attributes such as relevant knowledge and experience.

These results support previous claims regarding the importance of the combined influence of managerial attributes as opposed to single influences (Caughey & Chetty, 1994; Deligianni et al., 2015; Wang & Olsen, 2002; Zahra & Garvis, 2000). Thus, though owner/managers with a positive perception toward exporting would allocate sufficient resources, seek foreign opportunities and strategically plan their export market entry (Sousa et al., 2008), the presence of a high entrepreneurial orientation will encourage increased proactive behavior in exploiting these opportunities and predicting trends in international markets (Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, 2009). Those owner/managers will also be more innovative in developing export strategies (Brouthers et al., 2015) and enhancing opportunities to engage in export markets. Here, it is suggested that domestic market difficulties typically found in Algeria triggers opportunistic managerial attitudes (Azam et al. 2001; Roberts & Thoburn, 2003). Hence, hostility and lack of opportunities would act as push factors for owner/managers to become

opportunistic and seek international opportunities. These findings confirm the born global perspective, whereby firms from limited markets in their internationalization process, increasingly rely on opportunistic behavior more than on experiential learning (Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2015).

Alternatively, when managers with a positive perception toward exporting are equipped with sufficient export knowledge and relevant international experience (but not necessarily a high entrepreneurial orientation), they will still exhibit a high export intention. With accurate and relevant export skills and knowledge, managers are likely to encounter less uncertainty and hence be more willing to develop export entry strategies (Casillas et al., 2015). This is particularly applicable to Arab owner/managers such as the Algerian respondents who are characterized with high uncertainty avoidance (Elbeltagi, Al Sharji, Hardaker, & Elsetouhi, 2013; Ramdani, Mellahi, Guermat, & Kechad, 2014) which is likely to affect their propensity to venture into uncertain international markets, unless this is offset by foreign market knowledge. Additionally, with high international orientation (international experience and language abilities), they are more likely to avoid miscommunication issues (Densil, 2011; Nemkova et al., 2012), and benefit from foreign partners' support (Reuber & Fischer, 1997). This is again very relevant to collectivist Algerian owner/managers who often focus on relationship-building (Elbeltagi et al., 2013; Ramdani et al., 2014), placing greater emphasis on relationship-building for business purposes (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). In Algeria, collaborations are common among successful exporters (Reguia, 2014). Therefore, these owner/managers will have a high probability to develop a high export intention despite lack of entrepreneurial orientation. This is in accordance with the Uppsala theory of firms' internationalization, which suggests that firms' internationalization is influenced by the decision-maker's experience and knowledge toward export markets.

Finally, regarding the effect of managers' age in determining the SMEs' likelihood of entering export markets, this study found that this factor could be a double-edged sword. Though older managers are typically reluctant to enter foreign markets, due to their lack of proactiveness and opportunity seeking (Caughey & Chetty, 1994; Serra et al., 2012), when equipped with relevant attributes (positive perceptions and international orientation) they will take advantage of their experience and maturity to increase firms' chance to go abroad.

Limitations

The study argues the following limitations. First, the most commonly cited managerial characteristics are included, yet this list is not exhaustive. Future research should include additional factors that may also constitute important managerial attributes. Second, following previous studies and based on Sousa et al. (2008) claim that SMEs' international activities are typically managed by

a single person, our data were collected using a single respondent strategy. However, this strategy can lead to issues with external validity. Despite the robust tests, undertaken here to rule out such issues, further evidence is required to validate our model. Third, the study does not rule out possible endogeneity issues, including reversed causality. Although the proposed model was developed on the bases of theoretical and empirical evidence, and despite the adopted tests to rule out this issue, endogeneity problems may be present. Hence, the study calls for further longitudinal and action research studies to validate the proposed conceptualization. Finally, in terms of representativeness, the sample used in this study does reflect some disparities in terms of size and sector when compared with the overall population. Although the non-response test indicates no major bias, such differences should be taken into account when generalizing the findings. Thus, we call for further research from the North African region to validate our conclusions. Additionally, it should be noted that the potential for export was based on firms' interest and participation to trade events. Hence, we call on future studies to develop more precise diagnostic tools to assess export potential.

Theoretical implications

The extant findings present important theoretical implications. From an RBV perspective, current findings enhance the usefulness of this theory when explaining SMEs' export market entry. In line with the resource orchestration view (Hughes et al., 2018), the configuration approach offers specific resource deployment strategies expected to result in international market entry. Previous works (Gruber et al., 2010; Hughes et al., 2018; Nordqvist et al., 2014) identified a significant knowledge gap in terms of identifying the specific combination of resources in addition to the number of configurations that are likely to influence firms' behavior (Gruber et al., 2010; Ho et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2018). Hence, future research should adopt a similar perspective to study various combinations of additional resource factors (such as organizational and relational assets) affecting SMEs' behavior.

For the SME internationalization literature, the current study is one of the very first studies applying fsQCA to study SMEs' internationalization. By answering Terjesen, Hessels, and Li (2016) call for adopting more diverse and sophisticated analytical techniques, this study provides novel and more inclusive insights into firms' pre-export activities. The study captures the complexity of the managerial antecedent configurations leading to high export intention (Skarmas, Leonidou, & Saridakis, 2014). Here, Coviello (2015: p. 23) argues that "What remains missing is rich insight on who the entrepreneurs driving these international ventures are ... in terms of their qualities and characteristics." The findings suggest that firms' export intention does not depend on single managerial attributes, but rather different combinations of relevant attributes may enhance firms' behavior. Supporting

the coexistence of two different “routes” leading to high export intention, namely global and stages approaches, the results have contributed to reconcile the mixed evidence concerning the managerial attributes and their effect on SMEs’ internationalization. In this regard, researchers should always consider the “equifinality” phenomenon that is likely to be associated with SMEs’ behavior (Gast et al., 2018).

Ultimately, the study also adds a contextual contribution to the international SME literature. It is recognized that the character of entrepreneurial activity is likely to be context specific (Robson & Freel, 2008). This study contributes to the nascent internationalization research emerging from the North African region. Algeria is playing an increasingly important role on the global economy. Similarly, other North African nations such as Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia are equally important in the international scene and hence more evidence from this area should follow.

Practical implications

The present results hold important implications for export promotion organizations (EPOs) in North Africa and Algeria. First, based on the configuration approach adopted in this study, EPOs in this area could use these findings to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their programs through setting up a profiling system where SMEs’ owner/managers attributes are assessed and programs are delivered and customized accordingly with the identified needs. This will allow a more relevant and efficient targeting. In particular, the findings have confirmed the co-existence and validity of the two contrasting internationalization views (namely born global view vs. gradual view) among Algerian SMEs. Hence, both perspectives should be taken into consideration by EPOs to fit all requirements. Scholars have previously acknowledged the influence of the gradual internationalization approach on the design of the EPOs programs which did not fit with the opportunistic and opportunity driven internationalization of the born-global firms (Bell & McNaughton, 2000).

Specifically, the necessity analysis has demonstrated that a positive perception toward exporting is necessary for SMEs to embark on export activities, hence EPOs in developing countries can organize events and seminars where potential exporters are induced to the potential profits that could be generated from export markets. EPOs could work in collaboration with educational institutions (including universities) to promote positive perceptions of export activities. However, the sufficiency analysis has also revealed that a positive perception is not a sufficient condition to export intention. It is essential for EPOs to follow up those motivation events with relevant training (including language support) and foreign visits. Such follow-ups should primarily be directed to the managers lacking a strong

entrepreneurial orientation, since they are the ones in a higher need of such attributes. An alternative route could also be the promotion of managers' entrepreneurial minds, which should be primarily achieved through educational institutions. Our study suggests that entrepreneurial owner/managers may require less support than non-entrepreneurial owner/managers. Contrastingly, EPOs should also dedicate a more intensive support to SMEs run by older owner/managers (more than 40 years old) as these have fewer chances to expand to export markets when not equipped with relevant attributes.

Conclusion

Overall, the large proportion of export intention explained by the managerial characteristics under study confirms previous works in the African SME context reporting managerial characteristics as key to firms' internationalization (Ibeh, 2004; Ibeh, Wilson, & Chizema, 2012; Obben & Magagula, 2003). However, the novelty of this study resides in the ability of the configuration approach to identify the specific combinations of such attributes likely to increase SMEs' international market entry (complex causality and equifinality). Thus, the study highlights that managerial factors are complementary and only the presence of, at least, two of these factors can lead to a high export intention.

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